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India Lampard, J.

Missionary letters from
J. Lampard
No. 3.

Pam- India.

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# MISSIONARY LETTERS

from

## J. LAMPARD.

No. 3.

Marpha.
Postal address:-Mandla C.P. India.
July 28th 1893.

Dear Friends,

We are now somewhere about halfway through the rainy season; and have had more than the average quantity of rain up to date, which is contrary to expectation, a very short supply having been foretold. To those who have never visited tropical countries at this season of the year, the rainfall would be rather an astonishment could they see it. During the past eight weeks we have probably had ~~twice~~ as much rain as falls in England in twelve months, and as several days have been perfectly fine and bright, you may form some idea of what it is like when it does rain; exposure to a proper monsoon shower means a thorough soaking to the skin in a very few moments.

The aspect of the country is a good deal changed during these past two months. The hard, dry earth, full of great heat cracks, has eagerly drunk up the copious showers, and has become soft and fertile to an amazing extent; the abundance of water with the warm temperature, causing everything to grow like magic. One day a farmer is seen ploughing his field (with a pair of oxen and a plough, probably very little different from those in use

in the days of Abraham) the next day, he sows the seed, and a fortnight after the ground is verdant green with the young shoots, and at the end of some ten weeks he reaps his crop of maize. The jungle growths appear even more prolific, trees of all kinds putting forth new life, and the long grass, which grows sometimes to ~~four and five~~ 6, 8 & even 10 feet in height, springing up in every direction, while innumerable streams of water flow down the hill sides swelling the rivers into which they run into rushing torrents very dangerous to attempt to cross, sometimes for many days together, in the rude "dug-out" boats which are the only ones known here.

I promised in my last letter that this one should contain some general information about the Gonds, who, although numbering some two millions, are almost unknown to the world outside their own country. I have no books to which to refer but the following results of my own observation, enquiries and reading may be relied on as substantially correct.

T H E  G O N D S are an aboriginal Indian people, distinct from the great Aryan race which conquered and took up their residence in the northern parts of India, and the Dravidian races which similarly took possession of southern India, many centuries ago. During the wars which devastated India for hundreds of years, these aboriginal tribes gradually withdrew into the various mountain fastnesses of the country, the Gonds making their abode in the hill country which stretches nearly across the centre of India; here, while they were pretty well out of the reach of their enemies in the old days they have also been outside the sphere of the civilizing influences which have so largely changed the aspect of Indian life during the last century, and remain in their condition of primitive simplicity, ignorance and superstition. Originally the Gonds were a powerful kingdom, and there are still in existence remains of old palaces and temples which would show them to have been at one time a superior race, but this must have been many centuries ago, and I believe that little or no knowledge of their ancient greatness now remains even among the people themselves.

Of the R E L I G I O N of the Gonds it seems very difficult to get really accurate information, as they are very reserved on the subject. In many places Hindus have taken up their residence in Gond villages, or in other ways come in contact with them, and in these cases, the Gonds have imbibed some smattering of Hinduism, but nothing much more, I fancy, than making offerings occasionally to a few Hindu deities and naming their children after them. ~~The Gond proper has no gods, his~~ religion consists chiefly in efforts to appease the wrath or malignity of evil spirits of which he has a fairly

the one god worshipped by all Gonds in Bara Deo but the Gonds

long category. If sickness,poverty,or misfortune of any kind comes,then,with the help of the guni or wise-man,he seeks to find out which demon's wrath he has unwittingly incurred,and having found out who it is,he proceeds to propitiate him by various offerings and sacrifices. When talked to about these things,Gonds always laugh and pretend that it is all nonsense and that they don't believe in it,but there can be no doubt that they are genuinely in fear of these evil ones,and do their utmost to avoid offending them. They believe in the transmigration of souls in a way,for instance,if a man is eaten by a tiger,they believe that the man's spirit or soul remains in the tiger and prompts him to the destruction of other human beings. In addition to all this,there are numberless superstitions which it would probably take years to find out and investigate- a small one I have met with is that it is considered unlucky (why,I don't know) to utter one's own name,so that if you ask a man his name,someone else tells it you,or if he is alone and cannot get out of it,he will give you some nick-name by which he is known or in some way avoid giving his real one.

A G O N D V I L L A G E is a collection of a few dirty huts all built higgledy-piggledy,so that you can hardly find two of them facing in the same direction and built squarely. These huts are of the simplest possible construction,consisting of half-a-dozen stout poles about 8 or 10 feet long stuck in the ground,against which are fastened interlaced ~~interlaced~~ strips of bamboo as walls,and ~~caretives~~ having a thin daubing of mud outside,and a roof consisting of long jungle grass dried in the sun. This house practically costs nothing as all the material can be got in the jungle for the cutting. The roof slopes to within some four or five feet of the ground,so that one has to mind one's head and back in going out and in,and as there is nothing whatever in the shape of windows the houses are generally dark. Add to this that in addition to the human occupants, there are a brood or two of chickens,sundry pigs,goats and sometimes even a cow,and you have some idea of home-life among the Gonds. I am sorry to have to say that the Gonds are not much cleaner in their persons than they are in their houses,indeed, I fancy the majority of them never get a good wash except in the rains,when they can't help it. But I am inclined to think that even in London a fairly strong regiment could be formed of people who have never had a bath;and withal this unsavory description,the Gonds are by no means an unlovable people,as I am rapidly learning.

except a small Government Cat

F O O D. My impression,so far,is that the Gonds are not in such a ~~terrible~~ state of poverty as is common in some parts

of India, that while only a few of them at any time rise much above the level of a bare sufficiency of food, it is seldom that they lack that. The chief article of diet appears to be the commoner kinds of grain which are either crushed and boiled or ground to flour and made into chapattis(unleavened bread). The people are very fond of meat, but it is seldom that they have an opportunity of such indulgence; occasionally they may succeed in killing some wild animal, when there is a great feast and rejoicing, but the domestic animals seem to be not often killed, except perhaps a goat, pig or fowl on some festive or religious occasion. I might add under this head that rice and wheat are grown, but these are generally sold for consumption in other parts of India, and the proceeds go to enrich the grower; this year the wheat crop in this district has entirely failed, but the commoner grain crops have been good, so that the people have not suffered want. There are no shops in Gond villages, but a weekly ~~or bi-weekly~~ bazaar is held in various central places, into which the people living within a radius of perhaps ten miles come to make their purchases, like a country market in England. Of course the goods sold at these bazaars are very limited in number and character, chiefly cloth, grain, jewelry(!) axes, and such like every day Gond necessaries.

The mention of Jewelry, makes me think I ought to give a special paragraph to the G O N D  W O M E N. The thing that first strikes a stranger about a Gond woman is her jewelry. This is not exactly of the kind described in a list of presents made to the Princess May which I noticed in a paper sent here, the other day, but consists chiefly of glass and brass. All Gond ladies, wear an enormous quantity of small beads(such as children play with in England) around their necks, in some cases these bead necklets must be several pounds in weight. In addition to this the wrists are generally ornamented with, glass, lac and brass bracelets, and the ankles adorned with huge shining brass bands, very heavy and very ugly, but don't for a moment imagine that the ladies themselves have any doubt about the general beauty and attractiveness of their appearance. In features, I must confess, the Gond women are not lovely, indeed to put it as politely as possible, the majority are exceedingly plain, but, there are not wanting pleasing exceptions, and possibly I have fallen upon especially unfortunate parts of the country in this respect, so far.

Beyond this, there does not seem very much to say about the Gond woman more than that her life is spent chiefly in bringing water from the stream, cooking food and caring for her children in infancy, when once they can walk, they seem to require and get

rather less attention than is given to young pups in England. The Gond husband appears to consider his wife rather a part of his goods and chattels than the important member of his household, in fact there is a word in common use which signifies "pots and pans, wife and sundries generally". However, these women have more liberty and a freer life than is usually the case with Indian women and, never having known anything better, are ~~fairly~~ content and happy I think. The children are as merry as crickets, easily amused and delighting in a bit of fun.

A N I M A L S. The domestic animals are buffalos, cattle, horses, goats, pigs, dogs and fowls. Buffalos and cows are usually the property of the better off people and are kept for their milk which is made into ghee (clarified butter, one of the chief articles of commerce in India) and sent to the nearest large town or sold to traders who travel about the country collecting it. Horses are small and of very poor breed; they are not numerous all ploughing being done by bullocks. ~~Goats and~~ Fowls are frequently sold to Europeans and others in the nearest town or officials travelling about the district, but they are also, with pigs, sacrificed to the demons on the occasion of weddings, funerals etc. and the flesh eaten with rejoicing.

The following wild Animals are found in the Gond country. Buffalos, Tigers, leopards, bears, boar, several kinds of deer, and a variety of smaller game; birds of many species from the tall ~~cyrus~~ sārās birds (a water fowl standing four or five feet high) and huge vultures to a tiny creature not much larger than some of the insects. Snakes of all sizes, some harmless and some deadly poisonous abound, especially in the rainy season, scorpions too are a serious pest, while the insect world is infinite in variety, and countless myriads in number.

And now, as to C H R I S T I A N E F F O R T, among the Gonds. In addition to the C.M.S. there is no other large society working, but several small missions exist in, or on the borders, of the Gond country. So far as I have been able to ascertain, however, these workers in most cases seem to confine their efforts largely, if not entirely, to some central town (which would be more Hindu than Gond) and the mass of the people are left untouched. The C.M.S. are the exception to this rule, its men confining themselves almost exclusively to travelling about among the Gond villages, so that their ground (the Mandla district) is comparatively, well worked: I say comparatively, because the district is large and the missionaries few so that those people to whom the Gospel is preached, only hear it (with a few exceptions) once, or *at* the most, twice a year! But I calculate that out of the estimated number of two millions of Gonds, not more

than 50 000 at the outside, ever hear a word of Jesus and His love. Here is a field for a soul saving enthusiast! The country is wild and really aggressive work involves some amount of self-sacrifice and toil, but the people are simple, easy of access, and not wedded to a powerful system like Hinduism, and I am confident that big victories for the Cross of Christ lie before any really devoted, Holy Ghost worker. Drink is an obstacle; the people drink heavily, but not continuously; drinking generally takes place on religious and festive occasions when the whole village may be in a drunken condition for days. A few evenings ago, I went with one of the two friends with whom I am staying at present, to preach at a neighboring village; we found about 80 people assembled celebrating a recent death by a drinking bout. Everybody (except the women) even boys as young as ten and twelve years of age was more or less drunk, and the whole scene was a very sad one. But these poor slaves of sin and ignorance are not greater sinners than other men; fifty years ago English gentlemen usually retired to rest in an advanced stage of intoxication, and an occasional indulgence of this kind is about the only relief a Gond has from the common daily round of monotonous existence. Give them teachers sent from God and filled with His Spirit, and tens of thousands of them shall be washed from their sins and transformed into saints and soldiers of Jesus Christ.

With this glorious end ever in view, Iam,

Yours very sincerely,

J. Lampard.

P.S. Not to be returned.